



“Attitudes, Beliefs and Values Shaping Jewish Practice”

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Note: When a value is a traditional Jewish one, the Hebrew name for it is used. When a value (such as democracy) comes out of American Judaism and is more naturally associated with an English term, the English term is used. When a term (such as commitment to community) represents a traditional value that has been reframed in response to changed circumstances, the choice of terminology will vary based upon what seems most useful.

Ahava (love) The gift of love – from parent to child, between lovers and friends, teachers and students – is a central source of joy, nurture and growth, bringing much of what gives life its meaning. Jewish tradition portrays God as the ultimate source of love, embodied in Creation, in Torah and in relationships. Valuing love involves making efforts to sustain and protect loving relationships.

Anava (humility) Avoiding boastfulness and overconfidence in favor of modesty in self-understanding and self-presentation flows from a recognition of our finitude. This quality does not require self-flagellation or humiliation, but it does encourage cooperation and mutual respect. No one has complete possession of the truth.

Avadim hayinu bemitzrayim (We were slaves in Egypt [Deuteronomy 6:21]). Having experienced physical and spiritual degradation, Jews believe that this should create empathy with all who are down-trodden, victimized or in pain, and support for them. In the Torah we read, “You shall not oppress a stranger.” (Exodus 22:21)

Avoda (Service) One meaning of *avoda* is service to God. Narrowly, this can be understood as the Temple sacrifices and the worship that replaced them. But the term also refers to work, which can be understood as efforts to improve the world or to contribute to the welfare of society. The early Zionists sang of the redemptive power of work. Our tradition upholds the dignity of honest labor and requires even the wealthiest people to help prepare for Shabbat, because this work provides the context for Shabbat.

Bal tash’hit (Avoiding waste) Material resources are limited, and we have the responsibility to guard against overconsumption and needless waste. No matter how much we can afford to buy, we should protect each thing of worth to any person or creature even if it has little value to us directly. This reflects gratitude for what we have and appreciation for the needs of all.

B’riyut (Health and wellness) Jewish tradition values the body and good health, supporting measures to protect them. Taking pleasure in the senses and avoiding destructive behavior reflect this value, as does the pursuit of spiritual and emotional health.

Bitul z'man (Wasting time) The minutes and hours of our lives are a precious gift. When we do not use our time well, we squander that gift, which is an irreplaceable resource. *Bitul z'man* is a betrayal of ourselves. We fulfill this value when balancing our efforts to be productive with our awareness of the beauty and miracle in each moment.

Brit (Covenant) The parties in a relationship have obligations to each other. Jewish tradition suggests not only the importance of the Jewish people's commitments to God, but also the covenant made with all humanity and the covenanting among members of the Jewish community.

B'tzelem Elohim (Human beings are created in the image of God) Because we see ourselves as containing a spark of the divine, we understand every person has infinite worth; therefore, no human being should be treated merely as an object, and we should always attempt to see the humanity in those we encounter. This attitude, drawn from Genesis 1:26, underlies many Jewish values.

Darkhey shalom (Paths of peace) In a world where tension and conflict so often result in destructive behavior, one concern of which we should remain aware is the need for utilizing emotional, political, and financial resources in ways that create harmony. This especially applies to conflicts between nations, individuals and ethnic and religious groups.

Democracy A value added to Jewish tradition in modern times, the commitment to democracy involves the free expression of opinions and a belief in the ability of groups to govern themselves fairly, responsibly and effectively.

D'veykut (Connection to God) Awareness of the presence of the Divine in our lives brings the knowledge that our lives are a precious gift. Although we have a small place in an ordered universe, we can be uplifted by living in harmony with the rhythms of the universe and with awareness of the presence of God in our lives. *D'veykut* is thus a life-shaping connection, a much-to-be-desired source and expression of spirituality.

Diversity We benefit from our exposure to different ideas, cultures and ways of being in the world. It is a blessing that the world is diverse. People have differing abilities, interests, concerns and needs that are worthy of our attention and consideration. We value diversity within our communities and in the broader world.

Egalitarianism Rabbinic Judaism recognized the infinite worth of every human life. Contemporary Jews apply that awareness in our commitment to equal political, religious, social and legal treatment for women and men, homosexual and heterosexual, and people of all races and ethnicities. The implications of the idea that we all have been created *b'tzelem Elohim* have growing moral power as current social and economic conditions provide the impetus and insight needed for this ideal to move toward fulfillment.

Emet (Truth and integrity) Speaking truth to oneself and to others and living in a forthright fashion allow us to create communities characterized by trust, cooperation and mutuality. Living a life guided by pursuit of truth and integrity also removes one of the chief impediments to spirituality and loving relationships. The rabbis said that *emet* is the seal of God.

Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) As the ancient homeland of the Jewish people, the land of Israel has always had special meaning for Jews. With the revitalization of the land, broad-based *aliya* (migration to Israel) and creation of the modern State, the Jewish attachment to the land has come to mean a commitment to the welfare and safety of the State of Israel as well.

Fidelity Keeping promises and honoring contracts creates a sense of safety and reliability that shapes commercial, communal, and familial relationships in ways that add meaning to work, probity to public life, and warmth and durability to families.

Haganat hateva (Environmentalism) The natural world – Creation – is a wonder that we are meant to enjoy and appreciate. We are both the beneficiaries of the bounties of nature and the stewards of the natural world. As our power to damage the earth's ecology grows, our ability to benefit from Creation – and perhaps even human survival – depend upon the effectiveness of our stewardship.

Hesed (Covenanted caring) Loving-kindness in action does not always flow from feelings. *Hesed* is the caring we bring to members of our communities and our families. They deserve caring action when they need it simply because we share the bonds of interpersonal connection. Caring for each other is part of what makes us fully human.

Hidur mitzvah (Beautifying Jewish observance) Through graceful ritual objects, architecture, and joyous song, wonderful food and beautiful books, we take pleasure in maximizing the attractiveness of our ritual, our moral practice, and our celebrations. This not only enhances our Jewish experience; it draws others to it as well.

Hodaya (Gratitude)

Our lives are a gift. We can never fully earn our opportunities for experiencing love, beauty, growth or joy. They are gifts to us because we were born into this world. It is because even the poorest and least loved of us have received so much that each of us is capable of giving so much back. No matter how much we give, we can never give as much as we have received. Savoring each of these gifts means not living with a bloated sense of entitlement, but instead living a life charged with meaning.

Inclusion Welcoming all into our communities regardless of ability, age, race, sexual orientation, family status or level of knowledge allows our communities to embrace as many people as possible, which strengthens the community while allowing it to full serve all its members.

Jewish authenticity While indiscriminate borrowing from other cultures and religions can undermine Jewish living, Jewish life has been broadened and deepened through what Jews have absorbed from the many cultures to which they have been exposed. Finding the line between enhancement and diminution is a challenging and ongoing task.

Kavana (Intention) Bringing full attention to our thoughts, actions and words increases the fullness with which we live. Mindfulness helps not only in bringing ourselves to prayer; it helps us live deeply.

Kedusha (Holiness) Leviticus tells us that God is absolutely holy and that the times, places, and actions that bring us closer to God are holy as well. The system of *mitzvot* is intended to help us become more holy, more fully in touch with the Divine within us and in the world. *Kedusha* has a root meaning of separate, dedicated, or set apart. Particularly in an overwhelmingly secular society, efforts to follow a path of holiness can create life-rhythms that to some extent set one apart from others. We should attempt to maximize the holiness within our daily activities without erecting unnecessary interpersonal barriers.

Kehila (Commitment to community) According to Jewish tradition, human beings can only fulfill themselves fully in relationship. Community is the locus of our relationships. Furthermore, Judaism as a civilization can be experienced solely in community, can be passed on effectively only through the locus of community. Building and sustaining communities is critical to human fulfillment. As Jews, we strive to create communities that manifest justice, holiness, and peace.

K'vod hab'riyot (Human dignity) Created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, we can see the spark of the Divine in each other. In recognizing that each human face is in part a face of the Divine, we recognize that we are bound to respect the dignity of each human being and act in a way consistent with that dignity. Therefore we should avoid *oshek* (oppression) by, for example, paying workers fairly and on time, and providing safe working conditions.

Klal Yisrael (Unity and survival of the Jewish people) Despite the schisms that have historically been a part of the Jewish community, the Jews are one people with a shared history. We recognize that we are responsible for each other regardless of differences in ideology and practice, and that since the days of Abraham and Sarah, we have needed each other not only for our own survival but to make the world a better place.

Ladonay ha'aretz umelo'o ("The earth and all that is in it belong to God." [Psalms 24:1]) We are the beneficiaries of Creation and serve as its stewards. Human beings do not ultimately own what is theirs in the world; it is on loan to us, and we are responsible for doing with it what we believe its owner would will. This key idea underlies Jewish environmental and social ethics.

Limud torah (Jewish learning) Judaism has a powerfully textual tradition. To understand Jewish civilization requires regular study of our texts not only as an intellectual resource, but also as a stimulus for creativity and an opportunity for moral growth. Text study can create bonds among those who study together, and can be a profoundly spiritual experience that renews and strengthens the student. Study is an integral part of the worship experience and a foundation of Jewish life. Text study includes not only such classics as Bible, Talmud, and Midrash. Poetry, philosophy, mystical texts and current thought are part of it as well.

Menschlichkeit A *mensch* is a person of great integrity, courage and sensitivity, honesty and caring. The quality of being a mensch is *menschlichkeit*, which is a Yiddish term. While it has great meaning for Ashkenazic Jews, it should be noted that the Yiddish term was unknown to Sephardic Jews until they encountered it in Israel.

Menuha (Rest and renewal) Stepping back from work, consumption and productive activity for self-renewal and contemplation is a sacred act that provides perspective and offers us an opportunity for healing. This is a major focus of Shabbat.

Mitzvah (Obligation) Jewish tradition teaches that God gave 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah. While most Jews do not believe that each obligation we have was individually formulated for us by God and we realize that obligations inevitably change over time, we recognize that community can only exist if there are rules that community members follow. A community living in harmony and pursuing the Divine helps its members to discover the transformative power that comes from honoring obligations. Doing what I believe is the right thing simply because it is right helps to create an inner life that is clear as well as interpersonal bonds that are reliable. Some *mitzvot* serve as pathways connecting us to our community and our people, to our highest values, to humanity and to God.

Physical pleasure Our bodies are a gift. We demonstrate our appreciation of that gift by taking pleasure in all our senses. According to one midrash, we will be held accountable for every permitted physical pleasure we pass up – a wonderful meal, a comfortable bed, a walk in a beautiful forest, a loving hug. The *birkhot nehenin* are a large group of blessings that mark these pleasures.

Pluralism In a world where the observance of Judaism cannot be coerced and where groups within the Jewish community disagree about what to believe and how to practice, pluralism is necessary for the Jewish community's survival. In addition, pluralism is critical to democracy, which depends upon freedom of speech. The open exchange of ideas has also been critical to the evolution of Judaism. We embrace pluralism not as a necessary evil but as a source for creating vigor in Jewish life and helping with the improvement of Jewish civilization.

P'ru ur'vu (Be fruitful and multiply) The first commandment of Genesis is to bear children. While it was originally about guaranteeing that there would be future generations, today the size of each generation is an issue that deserves our scrutiny. The value of nurturing children has to do with the bonds of love between us, our ability to

pass on our beliefs, values, attitudes and practice, and the mutually transformative nature of the parent-child relationship. We fulfill the value by raising children, regardless of whether we are biological or adoptive parents. Those who are unable to give birth, or who for personal reasons decide not to raise children, fulfill this value by teaching and providing guidance to young people.

Rahmanut (Compassion/Mercy) Empathy for those who are less fortunate results in caring action that can involve the emotional, physical, and economic realms. Everyone is less fortunate in some way. All human beings are vulnerable. We need to have compassion on ourselves and others, especially those suffering from emotional, spiritual, physical, and financial difficulties. The Hebrew root of the word *rahmanut* is *rehem*, womb, which implies a deep and abiding love. All who are around us need our caring and compassion.

Shalsholet hakabbala (Preserving the chain of tradition) The oral and written traditions of the Jewish people stretch back to Abraham and Sarah and beyond. Our inheritance comes from this unbroken chain of living, evolving tradition that shapes our thoughts, actions, and vision. We are the current link in the chain, preserving the extraordinary richness we have inherited and adding our own experience and insight so that we leave a powerful legacy for subsequent generations.

Sh'lom bayit (Peace at home) If the community is the building block of Jewish civilization, then the family unit has been the building block of the community. Its stability is vital to the community as well as to family members. Those who share daily living should be honored, nurtured and loved by each other. This is necessary for *sh'lom bayit*. When this nurturing is present, the home is a successful primary locus for child-rearing, for building character, and for supporting secure, loving individuals. When it is absent because of abuse or violence or acts of humiliation, *sh'lom bayit* is impossible. Making the home a peaceful place is critical to its ability to carry out these tasks and to bring joy into the lives of the members of the family.

Sh'mirat haguf (Protecting the body) Our bodies are key to all we can do in the world – and they are a gift to us. Taking care of them allows us to experience and accomplish all else that is important in our lives, to honor that we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*.

Sh'mirat halashon (Guarding speech) According to Genesis, God created the world through words. Words are our most powerful weapons. What we say can build people up or tear them down, waste time or build relationships, pursue truth or spread rumors. Using words with restraint and wisdom helps to create a safe environment that supports individuals in their growth and the community in its pursuit of holiness.

Simha (Joy and celebration) Joyously marking Shabbat, holidays, and lifecycle milestones with friends and family, food, drink, and music helps us appreciate what we have, acknowledge transitions in our lives, and make the most of life. Thus Jews toast by saying, “*L'hayim*, to life.” The Bible proclaims, “Serve God in joy.” (Psalms 100:2)

Spirituality Just as we emphasize the importance of the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of every person, so do we recognize the importance of spiritual development. People vary widely in how they best discover, develop and express their spirituality; we encourage each person's individual development. This might include worship, social activism, meditation, enjoyment of nature, study, and aesthetic experiences. At its best the spiritual life of the community not only strengthens the whole, but it supports the individual spiritual journeys of its members as they repair their souls and seek divine presence in their lives.

Tikun olam (Improving the world) We live in a world that is far from perfect. Judaism has always had a messianic vision of a world redeemed, a world characterized by justice, sufficiency, harmony and peace. "We cannot expect to complete the task of bringing the world to that ultimate redemption, but we are not at liberty to neglect the task" (Avot 2.16). On the interpersonal, political, and environmental levels, there is an enormous amount to be done, and each good thing we do makes a difference.

Tza'ar ba'aley hayim (Prevention of pain to animals) Kindness to animals as God's creatures should shape our interactions with them. This applies both to avoiding cruelty (e.g. not teasing them) and to acting kindly (e.g. feeding, staying with or helping a trapped animal).

Tzedek (Social justice) From Biblical times through the present, we have had a tradition of resisting oppression. To ensure just treatment means preserving human dignity and meeting basic human needs, including education, dignified work, food, clothing and shelter. We live in a just society only when every one of its members is treated justly. Accomplishing that is a shared challenge. Providing funds for that purpose is the act of *tzedaka*.

Tz'niyut (Modesty) Maintaining the dignity of others and of oneself and respecting the sacred nature of sexuality involves making thoughtful decisions about how and when to express our sexuality and sexual desire. Modesty also involves not using speech and deed to attract undue attention to oneself. It is equally important for men and women. Dressing appropriately and acting in ways calculated not to attract undue attention help to create an atmosphere of self-respect and trust, safety, confidentiality, and mutuality.

Yirat Shamayim (Awe of God) Recognizing the awesome Power that unifies the diversity and complexity of the world, the Power that is the source of life, spirituality and ethics, we experience awe and reverence. Humbled by our smallness, we are inspired to reach higher and deeper.

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